

**Mission:**

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS**  
State Surgeon General & Secretary

**Vision:** To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**July 13, 2015**

**Contact: Debbie Stilphen, PIO**  
**(850) 983-5200, ext. 175**

**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN SANTA ROSA COUNTY  
ENCOURAGES RESIDENTS TO AVOID STRAY ANIMALS**

**Milton, FL** – The Florida Department of Health in Santa Rosa County would like to remind residents to take precautions to avoid animal bites after five bites from stray animals were reported in two weeks. In all five cases, the individuals had approached the animals and tried to touch or feed them. Post exposure rabies shots have been recommended in all five cases since the animals were strays and it is not known if they had been vaccinated against rabies.

Rabies is a disease that affects the brain. The virus is carried in the saliva of infected animals and is usually transmitted to people and other animals through a bite or scratch. Most cases of rabies occur in wild animals such as raccoons, foxes, skunks and bats, but domesticated animals can carry it as well.

Rabies is fatal to humans and animals, but rabies in humans can be prevented if rabies vaccine is administered as soon as possible after exposure. The cost of preventive vaccine for rabies is between \$1,800 and \$2,000.

An animal with rabies may appear sick or lethargic, have problems swallowing, or drool or salivate excessively. A wild animal may appear tamer than usual and some animals may have no visible symptoms.

The health department advises residents to take precautions to avoid exposing themselves or their pets to rabies:

- **Avoid all contact with wild and unfamiliar domesticated animals.**
- **Never try to feed or pick up a stray dog or cat and do not approach wild animals.**
- Do not place feeders in the yard – the food will attract unwanted animals such as raccoons, foxes and stray dogs and cats.
- Bring in pet food at night and secure trash cans with fasteners, or place trash containers in the garage.
- Do not leave pets outside unsupervised and do not allow them to roam free.
- Cover bird feeders. Most squirrel-proof coverings also deter wild animals.
- **Vaccinate pets against rabies and keep their vaccinations up to date.** Follow your veterinarian's recommendation for revaccination.
- **Contact Animal Control to remove stray animals from your neighborhood.**

If bitten, or scratched by a wild animal or stray domesticated animal, wash the wound immediately with soap and water. This is the first line of defense against rabies! Seek medical attention immediately and report the incident to the Florida Department of Health in Santa Rosa County at (850) 983-5275

**Florida Department of Health**

Santa Rosa County  
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Milton, Florida 32572-0929  
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**www.FloridaHealth.gov**

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between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, or after hours call (850) 418-5566.

For more information on rabies, visit our website at <http://santarosa.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/environmental-health/rabies-surveillance/index.html> or the Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/rabies/index.html>.

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